



# Charles Darwin School

Operated by the Charles Darwin Academy Trust

**Headteacher: Aston Smith, BA (Hons) MA NPQH**

20<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

**Re: Charles Darwin School Communications Policy 2024**

At Charles Darwin School we are committed to effectively communicating and engaging with all our stakeholders. After extensive consultation with parents, staff, Governors and Trustees I am very pleased to be able to share with you our new Communications Policy. Thank you to everyone who was part of the consultation process.

The school communicates in a variety of ways with families including social media, email, text, Satchel One, the school website, and our weekly newsletter "The Link" sent out every Friday during term time. The school also communicates via letters, telephone calls and meetings. Each student has a planner and this contains lots of useful information for students and parents and it is also an important tool for communicating between parents and teachers.

Face to face communication is also important to us and this takes the form of arranged meetings, parents' evenings, open events, award and celebration assemblies. Student progress is continually assessed and is communicated through a written student report three times a year. Parents are encouraged to share any concerns at the earliest opportunity with the school. We will always try and respond to queries as quickly as possible as outlined in the attached Communications Policy.

On the topic of communication, we always try to keep families up to date on what students are learning across our curriculum. Our curriculum was described by Ofsted as being ambitious and well organised. The link below provides an opportunity to look at both the values that underpin our curriculum as well as the specific content across each subject through the various key stages. Our Curriculum Leaders keep our curriculum under review and at present are looking at ways to make the KS3 curriculum more knowledge rich in its content. Also, look out for regular updates in the weekly Link newsletter called "What we are Learning in.." which gives families a flavour of students' recent learning experiences.

<https://www.cdarwin.com/page/?title=Curriculum+Aims+and+Intent&pid=575>

All school policies are reviewed regularly, which is particularly important for new policies to ensure their effectiveness.

Yours sincerely,

Aston Smith  
Headteacher

**CHARLES DARWIN SCHOOL**

**COMMUNICATION POLICY  
2024**

## **Rationale**

At Charles Darwin School we believe in building an effective, productive relationship between stakeholders. This requires good communication from all parties across the community. An honest, open and transparent dialogue is required to successfully support the students and employees within our care and safeguard their wellbeing.

### **Aims**

- To maintain effective, proactive communication systems
- To develop positive working relationships across all stakeholders
- To support the development of the child.

### **Objectives**

All communications at Charles Darwin School should

- Keep staff, students, parents and other stakeholders well informed
- Be open, honest, ethical and professional
- Use jargon-free English and be easily understood by all
- Be conducted in an appropriately timely manner
- Use the method of communication most effective and appropriate to the context, method and audience

### **Relationship to other policies**

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- CDAT Data Protection Policy
- School Complaints Procedure
- Mobile Phone Policy

## **Communication with stakeholders**

At Charles Darwin School we aim to have clear, effective communication with parents and the wider community. Effective communication enables us to share our aims and values, school successes and information about the school.

## **Communication from the school**

### **The school website**

The aim of the school website is to inform and also promote the school to the wider community. Therefore, the website does not contain any content which would be considered to be for an 'internal' audience.

### **Social Media**

CDS social media accounts are used to communicate news and successes to the Charles Darwin School community. These are maintained professionally and monitored regularly.

### **Weekly newsletters**

#### **The Link (external)**

This is our main regular communication between school and parents. Parents receive the Link via email every Friday during term time. The newsletter outlines the key foci, events and successes from the week. This is also a valuable planning resource with short-term dates outlined for information.

#### **Staff Bulletin (internal)**

This is our main communication for important, non-urgent items. All staff receive the Staff Bulletin via email every Friday during term time. This is the key information document for all staff.

#### **Staff Briefing (internal)**

Staff briefing takes place every Monday morning to update staff on events. Notes of the meeting are circulated and staff absent from the briefing are expected to read the notes.

## **Communication with parents**

Staff will always seek to establish positive and productive relationships with parents. It is appropriate that relationships are professional and parents are addressed in a formal manner. Parents should also extend this courtesy to staff. When contacting the school we would encourage parents to

use language that is exploratory, rather than accusatory, as we are all working together to achieve the best outcomes for our students.

Communication can take a variety of forms: verbal (through meetings or by telephone); written (through letters, notes in planners or email/text message) and via Satchel One.

### **Paperless communication**

We aim to have 100% of parents signed up to email to achieve paperless communication wherever possible. Where this is not appropriate, the parent must contact the school and a hard copy of communication can be provided.

### **Preference of communication**

Parents identify the order of preference for communication on entry to the school. This remains, unless amended, throughout the child's education. It is vital that parents update their contact details: phone number, email and address in a timely manner.

### **Separated parents**

Unless there is a court order to the contrary, the school will provide the same information to both parents, provided that contact details have been furnished. Copies of communications can be sent via the student if both parents are in agreement.

### **Student Planners**

Each student has a planner for noting down reminders for homework and to support them with organisation. It is also an important tool for communication between parents and teachers. Parents are asked to check and sign the planner on a weekly basis, which is then checked by the student's Form Tutor.

### **Satchel One**

Satchel One is used to communicate with parents and students regarding homework, Achieve Points, lower level Behavioural incidents (lower level). This app provides prompt communication of information.

### **Prospectus**

All prospective parents will receive a school prospectus upon request within primary school, via the School Office or by attending Open Day events. The school's prospectus is also available on the school website [www.cdarwin.com](http://www.cdarwin.com)

### **Open Events**

Prospective parents are invited to attend our Open Morning and/or Open Week when families can see the school in action. New parents are invited, along with their child, to an Induction Evening where the main channels of communication are outlined, essential information given and the school's expectations outlined. This is followed by Induction interviews with a senior member of staff where the Home-School Partnership Agreement is signed by all parties.

### **Teacher/Parent consultations**

Year 7 parents are invited to a "Meet the Tutor" event in the October of Year 7 to meet their child's Form Tutor and discuss how the student has settled into the school.

### **Parents' Evenings**

All parents are invited to attend a full parents' evening each year to review the academic, personal and social progress of their child. These meetings give parents the opportunity to speak with individual members of staff regarding their child's progress and to discuss any concerns they may have. Parents' evenings commence at 3.45pm with the last appointments at 6.40pm. Parents are able to make appointments via SchoolCloud, an on-line booking system. Due to the important nature of these meetings, the expectation is that all parents/carers will attend with their son/daughter.

### **Student Reports**

Student reports, called common assessment of progress and performance (CAPP) are produced for each year group three times a year. These reports contain important information regarding student progress and therefore one of these reports will be issued to parents when attending their child's parents' evening. The remaining two are distributed via tutor groups and parents will receive a text message to alert them that their child will be bringing this home.

### **Translation**

Key school documents will be translated into the home language on request to ensure effective communication.

### **Parents' feedback**

1. The school encourages parents to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity. The most relevant member of staff will arrange to see parents as soon as possible.
2. Feedback will be sought from parents on the service provided by the school. Replies are confidential and

will be collated and analysed by a senior member of staff. Issues arising will be shared and discussed by governors, the senior leadership team, staff and the School Council.

## **PTA**

The school has a thriving PTA. Its main purpose is to organise social events and raise money for the school but it is also a good way for parents to get involved in the life of the school and at times the school consults with this group of parents on ideas for the future.

PTA contact details: [friends@cdarwin.com](mailto:friends@cdarwin.com).

## **Communication from parents**

1. The main communication from parents should be via email or telephone and parents are asked to contact the school via [enquiries@cdarwin.com](mailto:enquiries@cdarwin.com) between 8.00am and 3.30pm Monday – Friday during term time. This enables the school to act in a timely manner and also ensures that the response is addressed within the time scale outlined below:

Acknowledgement: 1 working day (8.00am – 4.00pm)  
Response: 5 working days

2. In exceptional cases where further information or a thorough investigation is required a 10 working day limit is applicable. If this is the case, then a holding communication will be made.
3. Teachers want to respond to parental queries at the earliest opportunity and will do their best to do so. However, the majority of teachers' time is taken up teaching and preparing for lessons. Teachers' responsibilities extend beyond the classroom and they may be unable to respond on the day a query is made. There is no expectation to respond to queries during their personal/family time.
4. Whilst teachers set aside time each school day to check communications, illness and part-time working may also restrict an immediate response. We therefore ask for patience and understanding from our parents when awaiting a response.

5. Parents are requested not to contact their child via their mobile phone. In line with our Mobile Phone Policy, students should have their phones switched off from 8.30am – 3.00pm, unless with the express permission of the class teacher. A student seen using their phone without permission will have their phone confiscated. If parents need to contact their child during the school day they should contact main school reception who will be able to pass on urgent messages.

### **E-mail (the recommended communication method)**

1. Parents may wish to contact the school via email as an alternative to telephone or letter. The School Receptionist will forward any communication to the appropriate staff member for whom the message relates. All email communication will be treated in the same way as a letter.
2. The school is proactive in encouraging the use of email, with email contacts being publicised regularly in newsletters and all parents being encouraged to give an email address for prompt and effective communication.
3. However, as many staff have teaching commitments and statutory time limits to adhere to for some tasks, the school acknowledges that a fuller response to some queries may take time. In these circumstances the following response can be appropriate:

*Dear Sender,*

*Thank you for your email today. I am working on a number of statutory time-bound tasks and as such I will have limited access to my emails during this time. Please kindly bear with me, if your query is urgent, examples below, please contact main school Reception who will inform me of your call, otherwise I will endeavour to respond to your query as soon as I am able to:*

- *Safeguarding issue*
- *Permanent Exclusion*
- *Managed Moved placement termination*
- *Missing child episode*
- *New police involvement with a child*
- *Injury or inpatient admission of a child or staff member*
- *Cancellation of an arranged appointment*
- *Other emergency*



Charles Darwin School respects the work life balance of its staff. If an email is sent outside of normal working hours, there is no expectation for an immediate response to be provided.

### **Telephone calls**

All telephone enquires will pass through the School Receptionist who will direct the call to the relevant member of staff. In the likely event that the member of staff is not available to answer the call a message should be left on the voice mail and a return call will be placed at the earliest appropriate time.

### **Meetings**

1. At times, at the request of the school or parent, a meeting may take place if either party feel that this would be the most appropriate communication method. Meetings are conducted to discuss formal points or concerns pertaining to a student's welfare or well-being.
2. All meetings must be arranged in advance, parents should not arrive at school unannounced and expect to see a member of staff on demand.
3. Notes from telephone calls /meetings/ email content will be saved electronically into the student's file via linked documents on SIMS. Staff names should be removed and students should be referred to by initials.
4. All visitors to school must report to Reception, sign in and wait to be collected by the staff member they are seeing. Visitors must remain under supervision by a member of staff unless they are a known professional from an agency with all relevant DBS checks.
5. Communication from parents should be polite and civil at all times in line with our Mutual Respect values. Rudeness, inappropriate language, verbal abuse or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated and may result in the communication being ended immediately. Should the Headteacher deem it necessary for safeguarding and security reasons, action will be taken and restrictions may be put in place for future communication.
5. Charles Darwin staff are expected to be polite and civil at all times when communicating with parents, in line with our Mutual Respect values.

## **Communication with other schools and outside agencies**

1. We recognise that children have diverse needs and we are supported by various agencies and groups of professionals who keep us informed on better ways to meet these needs so that children may participate more fully in school life. Information will only be shared once parental agreement has been sought.
2. We also work closely with welfare-focused services, such as Educational Welfare, Social Services and Child Protection Units. We recognise that children have a fundamental right to be protected from harm, that their protection is a shared responsibility and that our school should provide a safe and secure environment. Communication between professionals is always confidential.

### **Accessibility of information**

We collect pupil information via pupil information forms at the start of the school year and throughout a child's time at school, via the Common Transfer File (CTF) or secure file transfer from a previous school.

Pupil data is essential for the school's operational use. Whilst the majority of pupil information parents/carers provide to us is mandatory, some of it is provided to us on a voluntary basis. In order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation, we will inform parents/carers at the point of collection whether they are required to provide certain pupil information to us or if they have a choice in this. Full details of the information we collect and how parents can access this can be found in the Pupil Privacy Notice on our website: [www.cdarwin.com](http://www.cdarwin.com).

## **Communication with Staff**

### **Meetings between Staff**

1. There is an integrated programme of meetings to facilitate involvement of staff, both formal and informal. The school's electronic calendar sets out the minimum frequency of meetings.

2. All formal meetings should be structured and minuted and members invited to contribute to the agenda. It is important that time is put aside for structured opportunities for staff to engage in team working and to contribute to department/faculty reflection on priorities, activities and future plans. Meeting notes should be taken, action points progressed and feedback given to staff.

### **Availability of minutes/Notes of meetings**

Minutes and notes of meetings should be shared after the meeting.

### **Email**

Information and notification of initiatives are communicated through the use of e-mail where appropriate. However, email does not replace face-to-face meetings where some discussion is required. A guide to email use and best practice is attached at Appendix A

1. All correspondence by email should be sent from an @cdarwin.com email address and never from a personal account.
2. Emails should always use appropriate and professional language.
3. Greetings and sign-offs should be professional.
4. Parents will likely have personal emails and it is appropriate to use the email address that is saved on SIMS. It is not appropriate for staff to use personal (non-@cdarwin.com) accounts for professional communication.
5. Staff should set time aside each day to check emails.
6. Never email sensitive child protection or safeguarding issues. These should be completed on 'MyConcern'.
7. Email communication regarding SEND/Gateway referrals and communication across the Borough should be completed on encrypted files such as EGRESS.
8. Never send emails that are offensive or threatening. If staff are in receipt of a threatening or abusive email from a parent or member of the community, do not respond. Please discuss with your line manager or SLT line manager.
9. Staff are responsible for the security of their emails and for protecting any information or data used and/or stored.
10. Do not to leave your mailbox open and unattended, always keep it password protected.
11. Never give your email password to anyone or allow anyone else to use your email.

### **Written Communications (post)**

These are placed in pigeon holes, in the staff room or school office for specified staff, which should be checked on a daily basis.

### **Staff Briefing**

Staff Briefing takes place each Monday morning at 8.15am in the Staff Room. Notes are taken and emailed to all staff. Staff who are unable to attend briefing are expected to read the notes as promptly as possible.

### **Staff Welcome Pack**

The Staff Welcome Pack is given to every member of staff at the beginning of each academic year.

### **Notice boards**

A staff notice board is located in the staff room. All corridor areas are planned to provide areas for celebrating students' work and displays should be mounted, checked for spelling and grammar (but not to the detriment of students' self-esteem) and made safe in line with Health and Safety Policy.

### **Written Communication**

All written communication external to the school can be sent via the school office for formatting and checking.

### **Social networking sites/blogs, etc.**

Staff and students must use social media responsibly, ensuring they are not bringing the school into disrepute. Staff are not permitted to communicate with parents or students via private social networking sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X etc.) or accept them as "friends". The exception is networks or blogs set up specifically for the purpose of teaching and learning, together with official School sites. Any social media sites set up by staff must be approved by the appropriate SLT line manager. This is part of our safeguarding procedure to protect students and staff.

### **Inappropriate Communication/Behaviour**

1. Following an incident of poor communication from any member of the Charles Darwin School community, it may be necessary to put into place actions that enable all parties to return to a positive standing.
2. Staff member: Please refer to the Complaints Policy. The school will support the re-building of trust.

However, an alternative member of staff may be appointed as a contact point if the school felt this appropriate.

3. Depending upon the severity of the situation, the following actions may be put into place:
  - A verbal/written warning to the parent about their behaviour/language
  - Any future meetings/discussions will be conducted with more than one member of the school staff so as not to compromise a lone member of staff

In more severe cases the school will put stricter restrictions in place whereby:

- Access into school will be pre-arranged and agreed in advance by both parties
- A single point of contact within school through whom all communications should be directed will be put in place
- The police or other external agencies will be informed.

The school does have the right to refuse access to the school site to anyone deemed to be a threat to the safeguarding of any members of the school community, including students and staff. (DfE Guidance 2012, "Advice on School Security: Access to and barring of individuals from school premises"). In this case a formal letter will be issued giving full details of when the ban begins and might end. The decision to refuse access would be agreed and reviewed by a representative of the Governing Body.

## Email Use – Guidance and Best Practice

### 1. Sending emails

The following should be taken into consideration before sending an email:

- Keep emails clear and concise.
- Is email the correct medium for communication?
- Consider expected communication style.
- Only copy in people who have an immediate need for the information.
- The time required for the recipient to respond
- Emails should not include images of the person/emojis that could be misinterpreted. Remember that emails can be forwarded and shared with a wider audience.
- Be cautious about using tone, sarcasm and humour. Some audiences might not understand or be offended. Please refrain from capitalisation if angry/upset or frustrated.
- Try to frame emails positively, (use positive words such as benefit and improvement instead of negative ones like failure and mistakes).
- From February 2024 staff distribution lists will be updated enabling staff to search ‘teachers of.....’ to identify those associated with particular students. This will ensure that emails are sent to targeted groups and not the whole staff.
- Unless there are exceptional circumstances, there is no expectation for staff to respond to messages out of hours or at weekends.
- Staff should be careful with ‘reply all’, does everyone need to be included? Vital information can be missed when there are too many emails.
- Always spell check and proof-read your emails.
- Remember to send out-of-office messages so that the audience you know will not be able to respond.

### 2. Receiving and managing emails

- If an email requires a response, consider carefully the use of the “reply all” button.
- Information/discussion regarding students should be saved and stored in the relevant section of the SIMS behaviour log, for example in the ‘initiatives’ section

### 3. Sensitive information

- Be professional about what you write about staff, students and families. Emails can be forwarded and seen by a wider audience.

### 4. Security

- Avoid sending large attachments such as video and images across email. Use OneDrive/teams to share large files with staff.
- If you receive an email that is suspicious/spam or of an offensive/adult nature, do not open it, delete it immediately.
- If you receive an email with an attachment or link purporting to be from a member of staff but from a non-@cdarwin.com address, do not open it, delete and report to IT.
- Never participate in chain emails where you are asked to forward an email to a number of others.

CHARLES DARWIN SCHOOL  
COMMUNICATION POLICY

Main Compilers: Aston Smith Headteacher  
Julie Hodgkinson, Personnel & Administration Manager

Created: January 2024

Consulted: CDS staff, union representatives, parents, governors

Anticipated review date: January 2027